

LOOK BACK IN ANGER

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OSBORNE' S LIFE

- ▶ He was born in 1929 in a London suburb, of a lower middle-class parents;• He was educated in London in a boarding school where he developed a passion for acting and for writing plays, but in 1946 he left school and worked for two trade magazines;• In 1948 he became an actor and shortly after an actor-manager, continuing to write his own plays especially during his periods of unemployment;• In 1956 he wrote LOOK BACK IN ANGER, which was produced at the Royal Court Theatre in London and in 1959 the company of Tony Richardson directed the film version of the book;• He also acted on TV (1969) and in several films, he worked as a theatre director and as a film scriptwriter;• During his career he has collected a lot of important awards: for Look Back In Anger he was declared the “ Most Promising Playwright of the Year” and received the New York Drama Critics’ Award for the Best Play of 1957;• He had four wives, and a daughter;• He died in 1994.

LOOK BACK IN ANGER

- ▶ Look Back In Anger is a John Osborne's play of 1956, that deals with a love triangle involving an intelligent and educated but disaffected young man of working class origin, Jimmy Porter; his impassive wife of upper-middle-class, Alison; and her haughty best friend, Helena Charles. Then there is Cliff, an amiable Welsh lodger who lives with Jimmy and Alison. • It was a genuine drama, about real events and people; an authentic picture of the younger generation in post-war English society; for this it became a kind of myth. • The play is taut in construction, full of stimulating ideas, and ends in an enigma: Jimmy is overwhelmed by Alison's suffering and seems at last to realize his immaturity, cruelty and excesses; Alison, having suffered so much, may now feel a closer attachment and a deeper commitment to her difficult husband. • This theatrical performance was considered a sort of watershed between the old and the new in the British theatre. • What it came through Look back in anger was the disordered talking and crying of the young of the Fifties.

THE CHARACTERS, JIMMY PORTER:

- ▶ he's the hero or rather the anti-hero of *Look Back in Anger* and became the prototype of the "angry young man" because he is half-way between disgusted cynics and passionate idealism. He is too feeble to make his protest against society (seem more than a clown's gesture), not even able to clarify himself what is wrong with society, expect that it is full of humbug. He is an outsider in rebellion against the whole Establishment which he sees personified in his wife and her family. He protests without a definite cause to fight for. The roots of his anger lie in the past, in his father's death and his mother's inadequacy, and is corrupted by selfishness and destructiveness, neurotic exaggerations and puerile contradictions: we are made to feel very clearly that anger can be an indispensable virtue, but also a dangerous vice; he has a Messiah complex with a tendency to destroy the world which he cannot save, but his psychological attitudes show the consequences of childhood trauma (his father's death), a sense of personal failure, a persecution complex as well as a betrayal complex (he sees Alison's contacts with her family and friends as a conspiracy against himself); he is masochist and sadistic (he is cruel to Alison and offensive to Cliff and Helena. he sees love as a conquest and marriage as a revenge); he is also sexually immature and impatient with good manners and vulgar. He has established a love-hate relationship with his wife since he wants to possess her, but at the same time he is afraid of her and tries to destroy their relationship.

THE CHARACTERS

- ▶ • She's Jimmy's victim, but she is the strongest of the two: she has the courage to leave her family, support his rudeness etc... She has married him, but does not accept his ideas and does not give all of herself to her husband. When she is pregnant, she refuses to play on and leaves Jimmy, she only comes back when the child is lost and she knows she cannot have another.
 - She is Alison's counter part, she is honest and believes in the traditional distinction between right and wrong; she recognizes Alison as Jimmy's rightful wife, even though she has taken him for a lover. She never pretends to accept Jimmy's ideas and never betrays him. She is of upper-class.
- ALISON HELENA

THE CHARACTERS CLIFF

- ▶ He is a working class uneducated man, he is a pleasant person who shows none of the neurotic behavior displayed by Jimmy.

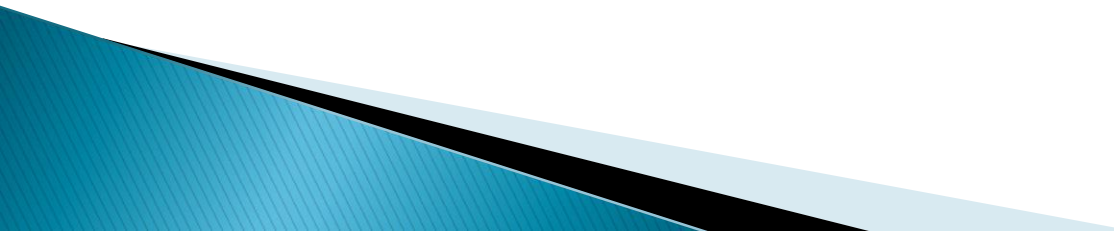
THE PLOT

- ▶ The plot is divided in three acts and it takes place in a single, naturalistic setting. Jimmy Porter is the main character and emerges as the representative of the disappointed British youth of the 1950s. He is an embittered university graduate who lives in an attic flat in the Midlands and is selling sweets in a kiosk with his friend Cliff; he is married with a daughter of a colonel in British Army in India, Alison, on whom he vents his violent complaints. His refusal of hypocrisy explains his desire to hurt, and his inability to show tenderness to all around him, but especially his wife. She is pregnant but unable to tell him. In the second act she decides to leave him, influenced by her friend Helena, an actress. In the last act she returns home after the loss of the baby by miscarriage, and there is a reconciliation with his husband, who makes an old play: pretending to bear and squirrel. The plot can be said to be “circular” because the third act starts with the replay of the first one.

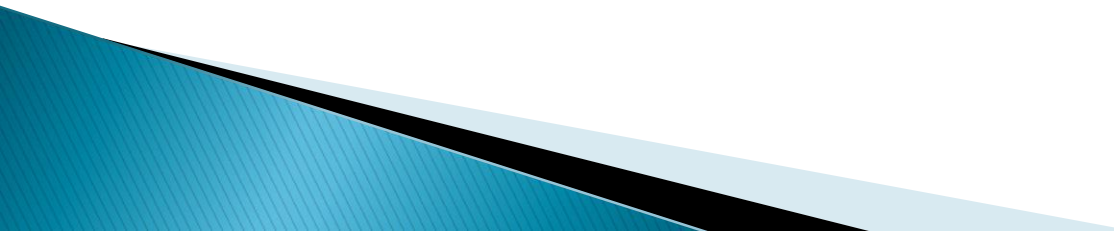
THE “ANGRY YOUNG MEN”

- ▶ These “Angry Young Men” represented a revolt against their age, a rejection of traditional values and an aspiration to something “different” because all of them had some quarrel with the events and aspects of the times:• the dissolution of the Colonial Empire in 1947/8, with the consequent loss of political prestige and military importance: even Jimmy Porter feels a nostalgia for the days of the Empire;• the end of the social revolution in 1951, with the return to power of a Churchill Cabinet; the false euphoria of the “New Elizabethan Age”;• the political, military and economic decline of Great Britain; the religious, social and educational “Establishment”, and the fact that young people, after the war, were not included in the dominant class, and often remained “outsiders”: Jimmy has studied in a university, but is now selling sweets in a kiosk. etc...The consequences of the general feeling of disillusionment and impotence were often empty rage, social irresponsibility, self – centered attitudes, the rise of the anti-heroes (a whole generation of “malcontents”), the coarsening of the language, the search for honesty, an inability to accept the fact of suffering, etc...; are attitudes observable in Jimmy Porter.

THE LANGUAGE

- ▶ The language is the most innovative element of the play: it is spontaneous and vital, no longer influenced by middle-class conventions, crude and violent. Jimmy's vulgar can be understood by everybody, so the play was addressed to a wider public; and when he or Cliff use vulgar or dialect expressions they always do it consciously and for an aim. There is also a use of colloquialism, comic variations in spelling or pronunciation, technical expressions and abbreviations.
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BACKGROUND

- ▶ Look Back in Anger was strongly autobiographical, and it is based on Osborne's unhappy marriage with Pamela Lane: while Osborne aspired towards a successful career in theatre, Lane had more practical and materialistic aspirations, not taking Osborne's ambitions seriously. It also contains much of Osborne's prewar life. Jimmy tirades against the mediocrity of middle-class, personified his hatred against his mother Nellie Beatrice.
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► Thank You

